

THE HEBREW SABBATH.

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The best method of understanding any institution is to study its history, and in these days of controversy regarding the true Sabbath-observance it may help us to a clearer conception of our personal duty to trace the development of the Sabbath down through the bible history. This is a task, however, for which the average layman to-day is hardly capable. With the changed views of Inspiration and the authority of the Holy Scriptures which have come to the modern church, it is no longer sufficient to quote some isolated text of the Bible for the settlement of a religious dispute; all references to the disputed question must be collected, and each must be interpreted in its exact historic setting. In the Old Testament we find different ideas of the Sabbath and to introduce order into the mass of references we must trace in the light of Israel's history the growth of this venerable institution. The old-fashioned method was to begin at Genesis and read through to Malachi in the order of the Books in the Sacred Canon; the new method is to begin with the earliest in order of time and to study the Sabbath in the light afforded by the historic criticism of recent years.

The origin of the Sabbath is wrapt in obscurity. It may have existed among the tribes of Israel before Moses organized them into a nation, but it is clearly recognized in the Ten Commandments which belong to the time of Moses; and the form which the Fourth Commandment took in the original decalogue was likely the very simple one: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

To the prophets of the eighth century before Christ we must go for the earliest recorded thought of the Israelites on Sabbath observance; and they clearly emphasize the two elements of humanity and worship. The Sabbath was a day of rest from ordinary toil for the sake of worshipping Jehovah. The local shrines throughout the land brought the worship of Jehovah within easy reach of all the people, and the